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Title: Secretary of State Warren Christopher met with New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Donald McKinnon to discuss economic matters, peacekeeping and bilateral relations. DoS Report. (950103)

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Text: STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT, TUESDAY, JANUARY 3 (Mideast, Bosnia, **New Zealand**) (1010) NEWS BRIEFING — Spokesman Michael McCurry discussed the following topics: U.S. "MANAGING CONTACTS" BETWEEN MIDEAST PARTIES The spokesman confirmed that the United States is continuing to manage contacts between Israel and Syria in pursuit of a comprehensive Middle East peace, but he declined to provide substantive details.

Asked about reports that the military chiefs of the two governments met last week in Washington for further discussions in that regard, he did not confirm specifically that the talks had occurred. But he said he did not know of any reason to dispute reports that Israeli and Syrian military chiefs had met with President Clinton.

"If they saw the president, my guess is that he told them...that it is important for them to continue to make progress that will narrow the gaps that assuredly exist between their respective positions," McCurry said.

"That's the work that we're doing," the spokesman said. "We are managing contacts between the parties....We're not commenting in any detail about the substantive exchanges that have occurred during those contacts." Nor would he comment in detail about last week's three-way summit among the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria in Alexandria, although he did say the United States rejects the proposition that any one side is responsible for obstacles to peace. The Alexandria Summit produced a communique that some have suggested blames Israel for the lack of progress in its peace talks with Syria.

"We by no means are being silent on it," he told reporters. "We will have discussions separately with each of the three governments that participated to better understand their views, and we will reaffirm our own view that we need to make progress towards a comprehensive and lasting peace for the region. "Sometimes we choose not to conduct diplomacy publicly," McCurry said. "We are going to continue to have discussions with the participants in that summit; we'll obviously continue our very close collaboration with Israel. Frankly, what we are most concerned about is continuing to do the very hard work that builds on the momentum that has existed in the peace process throughout this last year and that we hope will extend into the coming year.

"Our view is that the parties remain very directly engaged in substantive discussions that could close the serious gaps that do remain between their positions," McCurry said. "We believe that the trend in the region is towards a just and comprehensive peace, not away from it." Recalling that Israel and Jordan achieved an historic peace agreement in 1994, the spokesman asserted that "a determined effort on the part of the United States" had helped the parties to make that kind of progress.

He characterized the Israeli-Syrian negotiating track as "a tough discussion," and said they have not yet narrowed the gaps between their positions.

Asked about Defense Secretary Perry's planned trip to the region later this week, McCurry said the secretary would be discussing a wide range of bilateral issues "that sometimes don't get as complete treatment when we are dealing in the thick of the peace process itself." Perry will visit Egypt and Israel while he is in the Middle East.

"He'll also be in a position to reaffirm our own strong support for the (peace) process and to underscore the importance" of closing some of the gaps that remain, the spokesman said. Perry's visit is "part of an ongoing program of very high-level contacts" the United States maintains with Israel, which McCurry described as a strategic ally.

He cautioned reporters not to conclude that Perry's trip would involve detailed operational military work that would be an indication that Syria and Israel are closer to a peace agreement than has been thought. "Don't leap to that conclusion," McCurry said. If asked, the United States has pledged to provide troops to help police a truce between Israel and Syria on the Golan Heights.

Responding to a question, the spokesman noted that the Israeli cabinet has now addressed the question of at least one Jewish settlement near Jerusalem, but he did not offer any specific comment on the cabinet's action.

McCurry told reporters there has been no change in the U.S. view that the settlements "are an enormous complication as you look at the (peace) process." He said there is "every indication" that Israel and the Palestinians are continuing to deal with the issue in the context of their Declaration of Principles. "They continue to seem determined to resolve those issues that are framed and outlined within the declaration," he said.

BOSNIAN CEASE-FIRE NEEDS TO DEEPEN Noting that the cease-fire between the parties in Bosnia is not yet complete, McCurry said the cease-fire agreement needs to "deepen a little bit before we rejoice too much in its accomplishment because there continues to be heavy fighting."

The four-month cease-fire accord, which was mediated by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, went into effect on January 1. McCurry said the Contact Group will meet later in the week in Bonn to discuss ways to maintain the cease-fire.

The spokesman said the U.S. position on American troops for Bosnia has not changed. He repeated that if there is a peace settlement, if the parties "agree to bring the war to an end," the United States then would be willing to consider how it would best participate in implementing the peace, including the possibility of ground forces.

CHRISTOPHER MEETS WITH NEW ZEALAND FOREIGN MINISTER McCurry said that Secretary of State Christopher and New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Donald McKinnon were scheduled to meet later in the day to discuss economic matters, peacekeeping, the bilateral relationship and a wide range of other issues.

They also planned to discuss the New Zealand policy which keeps American naval ships from New Zealand ports. The United States will neither confirm nor deny if a ship carries nuclear weapons; New Zealand law bars nuclear armed ships. NNNN